



# NEWSLETTER

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**  
**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY**



## MIDWEST HONOR FLIGHT HONOR RIDE

**ANNOUNCING THE 3RD ANNUAL**



**HONOR RIDE**  
**MIDWEST HONOR FLIGHT**

**"RIDING TO KEEP THEM FLYING"**



**Sunday, June 25, 2023 / 2:30 PM**

Registration begins at 1:00 PM at the South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance. Honor a Veteran you know and ride to raise funds for Midwest Honor Flight. Ride includes a slow salute past the Sioux Falls VA Hospital before a ceremony at the South Dakota Veterans Cemetery.

**MORE INFORMATION:**

**[MIDWESTHONORFLIGHT.ORG/RIDE](http://MIDWESTHONORFLIGHT.ORG/RIDE)**

*All proceeds from this event go directly towards future Honor Flights and more importantly, our local Veterans.*

Next weekend is a great opportunity to don the leather, hop on the Harley, make new friends, reacquaint with old friends, and raise some funds for veterans traveling on a Midwest Honor Flight!

The ride starts at 1:00 pm Sunday, June 25, at the South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance and ends at the South Dakota Veterans Cemetery.

Hope we see you there!

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Happy Fathers Day to all our dads. Especially our military dads who won't be home to celebrate this day with their family.

# AMERICAN LEGION HOLDS 104TH STATE CONVENTION

Veterans from across the state attended the 104th annual South Dakota American Legion and Auxiliary Convention in Oa-coma last weekend.

Members in attendance conducted organizational business, discussed legislative issues, and elected leadership. Reports were presented by the following committees: Americanism, Credentials, Employment, Internal Organization, Legislative, National Security, Rehabilitation, Resolution, and Rules.

SDDVA Secretary Greg Whitlock provided a department up-



date and briefed the veterans on the

South Dakota Veterans Cemetery, the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home, Fallen Hero Bridge dedications, SDDVA legislative issues, and outreach programs.

Lt. Governor Larry Rhoden was one of the keynote speakers and thanked the post members for all they do for our veterans.

Courtney Steffen, Post 136 in Chester, was elected State Commander, Rod Smith of Chester was elected State Vice Commander of Districts 3-8, and Doug Harris of Rapid City was elected State Vice Commander for Districts 1 and 2.

Steffen is excited for this next year and all the possibilities and eagerly anticipating promoting the American Legion and all that they do.





# VA PROGRAMS TO SUPPORT VETERANS WHO ARE LONELY

Everyone experiences loneliness. For many, especially our most vulnerable, this loneliness can become chronic. Your age, gender, race and socioeconomic background does not matter. Even those with strong social support networks can still experience loneliness.

VA neurologist Dr. Indira Subramanian says a happily married couple “...can be lonely together.” That’s because loneliness is subjective. It is not a character flaw. It’s the gap between your current state of connection and your desired state. Many of our veterans feel a loss of connection soon after discharge or during the latter stages of life when many of their family and friends have moved or passed away.

Loneliness has been identified by doctors, nurses and social workers for decades. Many veterans do not receive regular visitors or phone calls. These veterans are more likely to visit emergency departments. They are more likely to phone crisis lines. And they are more likely to develop clinical conditions such as depression, anxiety and suicidal ideations. Some develop substance abuse issues.

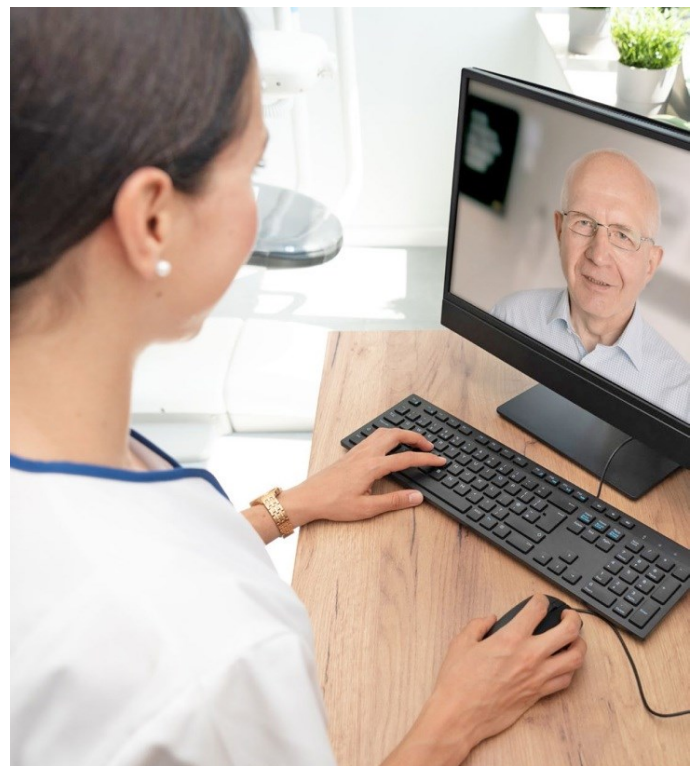
The VA has recognized the issue of loneliness and offers an array of programs to support veterans who may be struggling with it. Programs include pet therapy, music therapy and group therapy. In some areas, veterans with caregivers can request weekly visitation by a trained volunteer. This has the added benefit of providing regular respite for the caregiver.

Since the pandemic, a new virtual social prescribing program has resonated with veterans and volunteers alike. It’s called Compassionate Contact Corps. This program highlights the power of genuine human connection in combating loneliness and improving mental health outcomes.

Compassionate Contact Corps is a non-clinical program. A trained volunteer, preferably from the community, is matched with a veteran that has been identified by their clinician as potentially benefiting from additional social connection.

The volunteer phones the veteran weekly, usually for 15–60 minutes of meaningful conversation. It has become a signature program of American Red Cross and Soldier’s Angels, and there is significant participation from other veteran service organizations helping to combat this issue.

If you would like to help the VA support some of our most vulnerable veterans by volunteering for Compassionate Contact Corps or any of our other amazing volunteer opportunities, please go to [VA’s volunteer webpage](#) to learn more.



# FALL RIVER HOT AIR BALLOON FESTIVAL



## Fall River Hot Air Balloon Festival

Hot Springs in the southern Black Hills, will serve as the backdrop for the Fall River Hot Air Balloon Festival August 25-27. Balloon launches are scheduled for both Saturday and Sunday, about 6 a.m., from the Hot Springs Municipal Airport.

On Friday, there will be a magical show, farmers market, vendors, and a concert.

Saturday will see 30 balloons launch from the airport. In addition, there will be activities throughout downtown Hot Springs, including an Art Walk & Chalk, a free Kid Zone and vendors in Centennial Park, walk-in balloon at The Mammoth Site, Balloon Fest Volksmarch, live music, sidewalk sales, and special events and discounts at local businesses.

As the night casts its magical veil, the sky comes alive with an ethereal glow during the captivating "Glow around Town" event. Witness the dazzling luminosity of the balloons at The Mammoth Site, Centennial Park, Butler Park, and the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home.

Admissions to this event is free. Balloon rides are available to purchase in advance. For more information about this event visit their website at: <https://www.fallriverballoonfest.com/>.



# NATIONWIDE PATIENT SURVEY SHOWS VA HOSPITALS OUT PERFORM NON VA HOSPITALS

According to [Medicare's latest nationwide survey of patients](#), VA hospitals outperformed non-VA hospitals on all 10 core patient satisfaction metrics — including overall hospital rating, communication with doctors, communication about medication, willingness to recommend the hospital, and more.

As a part of the [survey](#), Medicare awards star ratings from one star to five stars, with “more stars representing better quality care.” Based on patient surveys between July 2021 and June 2022, 72% of VA hospitals received four or five stars for overall hospital rating compared to 48% of reporting non-VA hospitals. Additionally, VA hospitals received a higher percentage of four or five star ratings than non-VA hospitals for communication with doctors (87% vs. 48%), communication with nurses (59% vs. 35%), responsiveness of hospital staff (63% vs. 34%), communication about medicines (80% vs. 38%), cleanliness of the hospital environment (69% vs. 52%), quietness of the hospital environment (49% vs. 38%), discharge information (65% vs. 55%), care transition (76% vs. 35%), and willingness to recommend the hospital (76% vs. 52%). The results are drawn from Medicare's [Care Compare](#) website.

These findings align with a recent systematic review of more than 40 peer-reviewed studies, which found that VA health care is consistently as good as — or better than — non-VA health care.

“At the VA, veterans are the ultimate judges of our successes or failures — so we're very proud to be this highly rated in a survey of veterans,” said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. “Our goal at the VA is to deliver world-class care to every veteran, every time, and we will continue to invest in VA health care and the patient experience until we make that goal a reality.”

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services update the Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems Star Ratings each quarter. The survey is administered to a random sample of patients across the country. The survey asks discharged patients 29 questions about their recent hospital stay, including 19 core questions about critical aspects of patients' hospital experiences. The same questions are asked on VA and community hospital surveys to evaluate the patient experience. More information on methodology can be found at [CMS.gov](#).

The VA also surveys veterans in order to understand and improve the veteran experience with the VA. The [VA Trust Report](#) for the second quarter of fiscal year 2023 shows that nearly 90% of veterans who get their care from VA trust the VA for their care (based on 560,000 surveys). Additionally, more than 79% of veterans trust the VA overall, reflecting a 1.9% increase from the last quarter and a 24% increase since 2016.

Visit [access to care](#) to compare VA hospital data to other medical centers in the community. View [VA's trust report and other customer experience data](#) for more details.

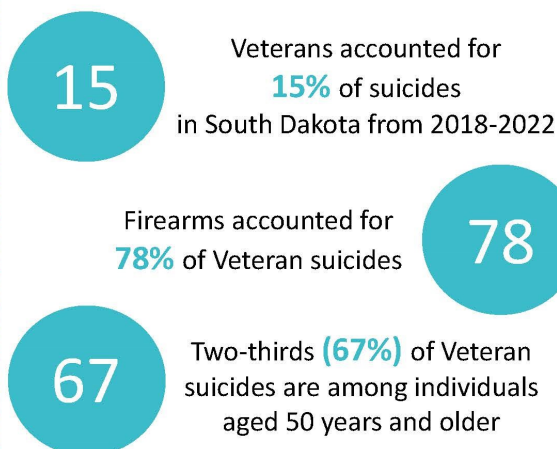




# Veterans

Although there has been increased focus and effort on suicide prevention in the military, suicide continues to impact veterans and their families. Factors that might contribute to higher suicide rates among veterans and their families include sustained exposure to combat, traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic loss, sexual assault or abuse, chronic pain, depression, anxiety, financial issues, and divorce or relationship issues.

## Suicide by the Numbers



## Warning Signs

- Talking about being a burden
- Being isolated
- Increased anxiety
- Increased substance use
- Looking for a way to access lethal means
- Increased anger or rage
- Extreme mood swings
- Expressing hopelessness
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Talking or posting about wanting to die
- Making plans for suicide

If these warning signs are noted, seek help as soon as possible by contacting a mental health professional or the Veteran Crisis Line by dialing **988** then **PRESS 1**

## Prevention Resources

- Veterans and their loved ones can chat online at [VeteransCrisisLine.net](https://VeteransCrisisLine.net)\*, dial **988** then **Press 1**, or send a text message to **838255** to receive free, confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. You don't have to be enrolled in VA benefits or health care to connect.
- To find a VA location near you, visit [va.gov/find-locations](https://va.gov/find-locations)
- Veterans and their families can call **1-877-WAR-VETS (927-8387)** to talk with fellow Veterans about your experiences.
- To connect with stories of help and hope, visit [maketheconnection.net](https://maketheconnection.net).
- Military OneSource offers trusted information, resources, and confidential help 24/7, giving service members and military families tools to stay well and thrive. To get connected, visit [militaryonesource.mil](https://militaryonesource.mil).
- Military and Veteran Caregiver Network (MVCN) offers peer-based support and services to connect those providing care to service members and veterans living with wounds, illnesses, injuries and/or aging. Visit [redcross.org/get-help/military-families/services-for-veterans/military-veteran-caregiver-network.html](https://redcross.org/get-help/military-families/services-for-veterans/military-veteran-caregiver-network.html)

# Veteran Justice (VJO) Outreach



Identify justice-involved Veterans through outreach: VJOs help with access to VA services early in the legal process by working with Veterans and the justice system.



## Behavioral Health Services

Mental health treatment:

- Substance use disorders
- PTSD & TBI treatment
- Residential treatment referrals

## Social Work Services

Assist with accessing:

- VA benefits
- Housing referrals/assistance
- Employment Services

## Health Care Services

- Medical
- Dental
- Pharmacy
- Prosthetic care
- Inpatient hospital services

Arranging **TREATMENT** instead of **JAIL** when court approved  
by collaborating with courts/judges

VJOs provide outreach, assessment  
& case management for Veterans  
involved with:

- ⇒ Jails
- ⇒ Court or Justice System
- ⇒ Law Enforcement

## Black Hills VA VJO Contacts:

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# UPCOMING EVENTS

Jun 15-18—VFW State Convention—(4-H Grounds)—Mitchell

Jun 19—State Offices Closed

Jun 22—SD Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—PFC Cy Kaiser—U.S. Army Reserve Center—(115 S. Roosevelt Street)—Aberdeen—1:30 pm (CT)

Jun 24 —SD Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—SGT Philip Iyotte—Community Events Center—(501 3rd Street)—White River—10:00 am (CT)

Jun 25—3rd Annual Midwest Honor Flight Honor Ride—Sioux Falls—(starts at the Alliance and ends at South Dakota Veterans Cemetery)—2:00 pm (CT)

Jul 1—SD Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—CW2 Scott A. Saboe—Lake Gospel Hall—(105 Lincoln Avenue)—Willow Lake—10:00 am (CT)

Jul 1—Veterans for Veterans Poker Run—The Depot—(210 S. Main Street)—Mitchell—11:00 am (CT)

Jul 1—SD Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—HM2 Charles T. Langenfeld—Redlin Art Center—(1200 33rd Street NE #310)—Watertown—2:00 pm (CT)

Jul 3-4—State Offices Closed

Jul 4—SD Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—SSG Robb Roling—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls—2:00 pm (CT)

Jul 7—SD Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—SP5 Samuel J. Jorgensen—Community Center—(112 N. Main Street)—Chamberlain—2:00 pm (CT)

Jul 17—Tee it Up for the Troops—Arrowhead Country Club—Rapid City—8:00 am (MT)

Jul 19—South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting—Rosalies—(9 8th Avenue E)—Sisseton—9:00 am (CT)

Jul 20—Rosebud Sioux Tribe Veterans Stand Down—Sinte Gleska University—(101 Antelope Circle)—Mission—10:00 am (CT)

Jul 28-29—"Last Out" production—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls

Jul 29-30—Sioux Falls Air Show

Jul 29—Korean War/Defense Veterans Appreciation Day—Brookings County Outdoor Adventure Center—(2810 22nd Avenue S)—Brookings—9:00 am to 3:00 pm (CT)

Aug 10-11—South Dakota Suicide Prevention Conference—Sioux Falls Convention Center

Aug 19—SFVAHCS Show and Shine

Aug 26—SD Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—LTC Gordon J. Lippman—Hill City—1:30 pm (MT)

Aug 27—SD Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—SP5 John P. Beckers—VFW (Main Street)—Gregory—2:00 pm (CT)

Aug 28—Barrel House Day of Giving for Midwest Honor Flight

Aug 31—Veterans Day at the SD State Fair

Aug 31—Sept 4—SD State Fair

Sep 4—State Offices Closed

Sep 5—7—SDDVA Annual Benefit School—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls

Sep 13-16—Black Hills Veterans March and Marathon

Sep 16—SD Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—LT Peter H. Monfore—Community Hall—(605 8th Street)—Springfield—2:00 pm (CT)

Sep 20—South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting—Rapid City



# UPCOMING EVENTS

Oct 7—SD Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—WO1 Roger S. Cameron—Community Building—(311 W. Main)—  
Pierpont—1:30 pm (CT)  
Oct 7—DAV Fall Conference—DAV Headquarters—Sioux Falls  
Oct 9—State Offices Closed  
Oct 14—SD Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—1LT Thomas M. Martin—Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell  
Street)—Sioux Falls—10:00 am (CT)  
Oct 21—Elvis Night/50's Dance Midwest Honor Flight Fundraiser—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell  
Street)—Sioux Falls  
Nov 4—Northern Hills Veterans Appreciation Fair—Sturgis Community Center—11:00 am—2:00 pm (MT)  
Nov 10—State Offices Closed  
Nov 13—Barrel House Day of Giving for SDVC Wreaths Across America  
Nov 15—South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting—Sioux Falls  
Nov 23—State Offices Closed  
Dec 16—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony at South Dakota Veterans Cemetery—Sioux  
Falls—11:00 am (CT)  
Dec 25—State Offices Closed

## 2024 Events

Jan 10—South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting—Pierre  
Feb 16—18—American Legion Mid-Winter Conference—Deadwood  
Jun 20—23—American Legion State Conference—Pierre  
Dec 14—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony at South Dakota Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls—  
11:00 am (CT)

## 2025 Events

Feb 14—16—American Legion Mid-Winter Conference—Oacoma  
Jun 19—22—American Legion State Conference—Huron  
Dec 13—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony at South Dakota Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls—  
11:00 am (CT)

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